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AFGHANISTAN

SNAPSHOT

Afghan Cashmere Trumps Spade

Afghan women are receiving training on making cashmere clothing for sale to high-end retailers



USAID/ASAP

Khadeeja, one of the women who is receiving training on making quality cashmere clothing, knits a scarf.

Kate Spade plans to create about 1,000 jobs for Afghan women during the next three years by purchasing their handmade cashmere clothing.

Afghanistan is estimated to be the third largest cashmere producer in the world. Handmade cashmere clothing fetches a high price in international markets, making the luxury product a lucrative opportunity for Afghan women who need jobs that enable them to stay close their families.

Building upon the opportunity to boost Afghanistan's economy and improve women's livelihoods, USAID began providing training for disadvantaged women on weaving and knitting cashmere into high-quality clothing. The cashmere training, which started in March 2011, has also provided the local women with lessons in business, marketing, rights awareness, and basic life skills. The project has reached 240 women in Dasti Barchi District of Kabul Province. Each class trains 30 to 40 women who also receive food and transportation support from USAID.

Prior to the training, Khadeeja, a housewife who lives with her six children and husband in Kabul, had no skills that could help generate income to support her family. After attending the training, she is now one of the most talented cashmere weavers in the group. She learned how to knit hats and scarves and is eager to learn how to knit gloves.

"Before the training, I was jobless at home," said Khadeeja "My husband was the only person who supported my big family financially, but now I can knit beautiful things."

The training is laying the foundation for a partnership between Women for Women International, a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of women, and Kate Spade, a high-end U.S. clothing retailer. The women participating in USAID's training will sell their hand-knitted cashmere items to Kate Spade for its 2011 holiday line.

"I will receive orders from international markets and they will pay me a good price for my products," said Khadeeja.